

passion that is as fleeting as the ephemeral race, which is as the grass that is cut down."

"Who art thou?" I demanded, in a clear but forced voice.

"I am the Oracle of Tum. I know all that is past and all that is to come. Excuse me."

"Wilt thou answer the questions I would put to fate?"

"I will."

"Oracle of Tum, thou knowest I love. Deign to tell me if there is hope for me in my attachment. Answer—Ay or No!"

"Child of mortal," replied the sphinx, "know that there is no—Good night!" And the voice abruptly ceased.

The silence recalled me to my senses, and I was certainly surprised at myself. Was it an illusion I had suffered, such as I had often read about? Was I ill? Had the wine really gone to my head? And then I suddenly remembered Rose Herrick's banter about the haunted room. Too surely it was haunted, but by a real spirit? I was skeptical of ghosts and spiritualism; but it seemed that the superstitious fibre, which I believe exists in every man, was strangely vibrating in me now. What if, after all, there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in my philosophy! As to the answer of the spirit, I can't say it troubled me then. I was too much concerned about my strange experience.

III.

Next morning when I awoke, with the genial sunshine streaming into my window, the event of the past night seemed like a curious dream or nightmare, and I almost persuaded myself that I had been the subject of a waking dream; which are common enough, although I had never experienced one myself before. Still I was not perfectly satisfied with this explanation; the whole affair seemed to me so real. I determined, however, to say nothing about it to any body, and when Rose Herrick twitted me again at the breakfast-table about ghosts, I vowed an utter immunity from any of their clandestine visitations. I thought I observed a suppressed smile on her lips, but she only replied:

"Ah, then! Mr. Temple, I'm afraid the spirits think they will make no impression on your hard legal soul."

I was left alone the greater part of this day—the day after Christmas. In the morning the young ladies, Miss Ethel and Miss Rose, and some of the children, paid a visit to a neighboring family, Mr. Heywood driving them. Charley Deben, his brother Frank, and some more went out shooting. I remained at home, having some letters to write, and wishing to be alone. I was somewhat sulky and jealous at Heywood's monopoly of Ethel during the entire day. She sat beside him on the front seat of the trap, and they went off very gaily together, Rose Herrick laughing and waving her hand back to me as I stood rather glumly at the door. I found the drawing-room empty when I went indoors, and was not sorry for it. I lay down on a lounge and reflected over my visit. It had been a happy one, and yet an unhappy one. In Ethel's company I was happy, and yet I was stung by the presence of Heywood, and the attentions he paid her. I reasoned with myself, and came to the conclusion that it was silly on my part, and useless, to be discomfited by anything of the kind. I convinced myself that I ought to act as if she was no more to me than Rose Herrick. I was spoiling my holiday by my absurd fancies, and if I could not master myself, the sooner I left for town the better. "Yes," I said to myself, "I will make my exit to-morrow, or at least as soon as I can get away." Then I fell to thinking about my uncanny experience with the sphinx. I was not satisfied that it was an illusion of the senses, and yet I could think of no possible explanation of it. It could not be a trick, for there was no mechanism about the little table, with its slender stem and two knickknacks. Ventriloquism, too, was out of the question. I did not know what to make of it. It occurred to me to consult the library about "illusions," "dreams," "spiritualism," &c., and I went to it at once. On the library table lay a collection of newspapers and periodicals, some of which were scientific, others popular. There was an electrical journal amongst the former, with an illustrated cover which interested me. I took it up, and opened it at a marked page. The mystery of the sphinx was at once revealed. On this page was a diagram representing the practical use of a new invention called the telephone, an instrument conveying actual speech by means of electricity. It was the first I had heard of the articulating telephone.

I saw it all now. Charley's brother Frank was an electrician by profession, and he had brought home with him two American telephones. The girls had conceived the idea of tricking me by their means, and had got him to fix up a telephone wire for them, while they had skillfully enclosed the little instrument in the sphinx pincushion on the writing-table. No doubt they had the other telephone at the other end of the wire in a convenient place, where they could use it without being seen or heard, and thus by speaking into it they were enabled to act the Oracle of Tum, since the telephone inside the sphinx reproduced whatever sounds they made. This revelation filled me with glee and triumph. I now recollected about the laughter at the beginning, and sudden stoppage of the oracle at the end of the conversation I had had with the sphinx; and as I did not doubt that Rose Herrick played the oracle, I imagined that Ethel had suddenly ended the seance by forcibly stopping her mouth.

I went to my sitting-room and examined the sphinx and table. Sure enough I felt the hard frame of the telephone inside the pincushion, and traced the wire, a fine silk-covered wire, like thread, down the leg of the table, under the carpet, and up the wall, till it joined the ordinary bell-wire of the room, which had been utilized as part of the telephone circuit.

Evening came, and the young ladies returned. I met them with my usual manner. They had had a splendid day, and so wished I had been along with them. I had quite lost myself moping up in the house all day. The shooting party returned soon after, and we all spent a comfortable, sociable evening in the drawing-room, with music and conversation.

When the ladies had retired for the night, I was not long in following suit. I went at once to my chamber, and took my seat as quietly as possible beside the little writing-table, and applied my ear to the sphinx. I could hear indistinct sounds, as of speaking, and occasionally a little low laughter. In a few moments the sounds became more distinct, and I heard perfectly, as well as recognized, the voices of the speakers—Rose and Ethel!

"I wonder if he is in his room yet?" said Rose.

"O, no, he can't be," said Ethel; "gentlemen never break up all at once."

"Now, Ethel, after stopping me last night, confess you do like Mr. Temple—a little!"

"Well, then, I do like him—a little."

"And you don't care for Mr. Heywood—not much?"

"And I don't care for Mr. Heywood—not much; but I know who does."

This was indeed a revelation to me. The blood rushed into my face, and my heart palpitated so that I feared they might hear it through the telephone.

"Who would have thought Mr. Temple was a poet?" said Rose.

I strove hard to hear more, but could only make out indistinct sounds. Suddenly it occurred to me to make a noise to attract their attention, and inform them that I had got to my room. I flung myself heavily into my easy-chair, and heaved a long, hopeless sigh.

"O, there he is!" I heard Rose say, in an intense whisper. "Did you hear that groan? O! he is very bad."

There was a period of silence. Then I heard a voice issuing from the sphinx in lofty and solemn tones. It was the voice of the Oracle of Tum.

"Child of mortals," it began, "Where art thou?"

"Oracle of Tum," I replied, here am I."

"Wouldst thou know to whom thy destiny is linked in future? Wouldst thou know the fate that hangs over thy love? Wouldst thou lift the veil of the unknown to gaze upon the features of thy beloved? Thou whose soul is yearning for a daughter of thy transient race, wouldst thou know if she loves thee?"

"Oracle of Tum," I replied in calm and measured accents, "know that I am indifferent. Know that a child of mortals, that passionate and feeble race which you seem to despise, can also display the unshaken self command of an immortal. I solicit no revelations from destiny; I am content to wait with fortitude. Oracle of Tum, I am indifferent."

I heard a half suppressed "O my!" and that was all. Need I say I went to bed one of the happiest of men?

The next morning I preserved my usual gravity at breakfast, and read my letters diligently, but with agitated thoughts. During the forenoon I found an opportunity to see Miss Ethel in the garden, where she happened to be alone.

"Miss Ethel," I said, as we reached an arbor at the end of the Pear-tree Walk, "I had a strange experience last night."

She blushed very deeply, and turned aside her head.

"Did you ever hear of the Oracle of Tum?"

There was no reply.

"Ethel," I said, earnestly, taking her hand, "you know that I love you. I am here to ask you if you return my love—to ask you if you will be my wife."

Ethel Deben was as true then as she had ever been. I took her in my arms, and she laid her beautiful head on my breast.

At this moment there was a light foot on the walk and a light laugh on the air. We looked up, and saw Rose Herrick tripping towards us with a roguish look in her face, while Mr. Heywood stood behind at the far end of the walk.

"Destiny has revealed itself at last," she said in coming forward.

"In spite of Tum's great oracle," I replied.

"Well, did I not tell you there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in your philosophy?"

"Name them," said I.

"Why, the telephone. And did I not tell you that there were angels still who came to do good deeds to men?"

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Why, myself," answered Rose.

"That is Mr. Heywood at the end of the walk. Had we not better go to him?" said Ethel.

"That is my own Tum," said Rose, "and henceforth I am his own exclusive oracle."

Alaska.

It is cold enough in Alaska, but not so cold as some people imagine. The natives, however, keep their chickens under their beds at night, to protect them from the cold. These people are very fond of cats, and every family owns at least eight or ten, and night is made hideous in consequence. In appearance these natives resemble negroes, and are very polite to every one. They live on the flesh of the seal, for though the whites may despise it, the natives regard it as their chief food. They use the blubber for fuel, and to feed the chickens. Liquor, of which they are passionately fond, is not allowed on the islands, and, therefore, they manufacture a kind of beer, composed of half a dozen different things, rice, sugar, water, etc., and on this decoction they manage to get very drunk indeed. The seals, by the way, are very easily caught, for they are not at all timid. A man can walk among them as among the hogs in a barn yard, and they are driven up into the island, and into pens, where they are slaughtered. The flesh possesses very little taste; it is neither good nor bad, and therefore is not pleasant to eat. Dogs are never allowed to come upon these islands, where most of the seals are caught, for they disturb and frighten them by barking. For four or five months in the year, Alaska is endurable; but it is the dreariest of all places in winter. Once in two years the bishop comes to the islands to marry all those who have a desire to try wedded life. They must take their chance then, or wait for another two years to pass. Thus, with timid swains it is often "now or never."

Beware of Cold.

A cold is often the precursor of serious illness and death. Whatever weak place we have, whatever constitutional disease we be subject to, cold will surely discover. We take cold because our vitality is too low to ward off the effects of the reduced temperature around us. As a matter of the first importance, then, to resist cold and the various derangements of the system consequent, it is necessary by proper nutrition to maintain our natural animal heat; second, to retain this heat by a sufficient quantity of clothing; third, to regulate with care the temperature of the air we breathe. Contrary to the opinion current among lovers of cold weather, a fire in the bedroom in winter is cheaper and better than a doctor's bill; for, owing to our inactive condition during sleep, the circulation of the vitalizing blood is both slow and imperfect, and hence the danger of taking cold by breathing cold air is greatly increased. Never neglect a cold; it is a dangerous liberty to take with the healthiest constitution.

An Old Residenter.

A STORY OF AN OLD GUN.

You couldn't call him a sportsman by any strain on your imagination, and yet he was by no means a loafer, though he did talk with a drawl which indicated that he didn't regard time as a very valuable commodity. He sat on the fence as the train came up to Siegfried's Bridge with the three Easton fancy gunners aboard, whom he was to pilot across the country after quail. His gun, having the lock tied on with a string, reposed across his knees, and his dog, looking like the ghost of starvation, reposed at his feet. The Easton men came up to him.

"Do you know Abe Hertzog?"

"Y-a-a-s, I know him."

"Where can we find him?"

"R-i-g-h-t h-yar, I guess."

"Are you Mr. Hertzog?"

"Y-a-a-s! that's what I'm taxed for, any way."

"Jimmy!" said one of the party, sotto voce, "can this be the same man that Cap told us was personally acquainted with every quail family in Allen township?"

"You fellers want to go arter some quails, eh?"

"That's what we come for. Do you know any thing about them?"

"W-a-a-l, yaas; I can tell one when I see it."

"What kind of a gun have you got there?"

"W-a-a-l, ye see, mister, that gun's an old residenter; bin into our family ever since the first old Hertzog moved up h-yar. That gun's a rifle, mister, an' she shoots mighty quick. Handle her a little careful, mister," he continued, as he handed the old thing over for inspection; "she has a way of tumblin' apart if she's used rough like."

The old rifle had a barrel about as long as a fence rail, with iron enough in it for a young Gatling gun, and a bore not larger than a healthy rye straw, while all the stock it had was absorbed in a brass trap-door leading into a cellar smelling of Verdigris, and filled with grease and little pieces of rags.

"How do you kill any thing with this? Knock it down?"

"W-a-a-l, yes, sometimes. That's the way I busted the stock thar whar the rawhide bandage air, a-knockin' a fellow down what made fun of it."

At this point the investigator suddenly lost interest in the gun, and the party moved off into the country. As they climbed the fifteenth fence, the old man paused on the top rail and waved his hand indefinitely over the fields before them.

"Gents, there's quails all about h-yar, and over yander—yaas, an' thar's one on 'em, now," he added, as he drew up his old residenter and knocked it over where it sat.

"What! do you shoot a bird on the ground?" Why, old man, that's infernal potting."

"S' that so?" inquired the old man, humbly, as he picked up a piece of his gun-stock that had been jarred off by the shot.

Just then a small covey of the birds took wing, and the man who scorned pot-hunting blazed away with both barrels of a costly breech-loader, and missed.

"Whar? Whar do you shoot 'em, mister?" inquired the old man, quietly, as he put his patch and bullet on the muzzle of his rifle which he held between his legs while he rammed the charge home, and then, as a stray bird flew overhead, he raised and dropped it.

"Is that ar' the way you want it done, mister?"

The objector said nothing, and the gunning proceeded; but it soon became evident that the sportsmen were doing the gunning and the old man was doing the shooting. The lock tumbled off his gun occasionally, and the barrel had a loose habit of parting company with the stock; but the old man had a pocket full of strings, and as fast as it gave out he tied it up and made ready to shoot whenever a bird showed, and he occasionally varied the monotony of the proceedings by coolly blazing into the bushes, whereupon his mean-looking dog would rush in and drag out a dead rabbit.

The Easton party hunted faithfully, according to their lights, and shot upon the most scientific principles; but, somehow, the old man got the game, as the count showed five quail and a pheasant among the three for the day's work, while Mr. Hertzog tottled along under twenty-two quail and four rabbits; and as they sat on the board pile at the depot bargaining for the old man's lot, he remarked:

"Ye see, gents, Old Residenter be'ant much of a gun to look at. She ain't purty or handsome at all, but I tell you she's mighty on the shoot. All you's got to do is jest grease the patch right well and ram the ball down close; and then if you pint her at a bird and pull, the bird's got to stop. Leasewise I allers find it so. Yee see, gents, whar a man has sich an awfully purty gun, his 'tention's kinder taken up admirin' of it like, an' the bird goes away after he shoots. Leasewise, I allers find it so."

Just then the lock dropped off "Old Residenter" for the eleventh time, and, as the old man wasn't going to shoot any more that day, he put it in his pocket along with his game money, saying:

"Thank ye, gents, thankee. Come up soon again, an' I'll take Old Residenter out any time; we'll be purty sure to get something." And he meanders off into the Indian summer haze.

A Rough Retort.

In the city of Halifax there dwelt a lawyer, crafty subtle and as cute as a fox. An Indian of the Miami tribe, named Simon, owed him some money. The poor red man brought his money to the creditor and waited, expecting the lawyer to write a receipt.

"What are you waiting for?" said the lawyer.

"Receipt," said the Indian.

"A receipt," said the lawyer, "receipt? What do you know about a receipt? Can you understand the nature of a receipt? Tell me the use of one, and I will give it to you."

The Indian looked at him a moment, then said: "S'pose may be die; I me go to heben; me find gate locked; me see the Postle Peter; he say, 'Simon what do you want?' 'Me want to get in?' He say, 'You pay Mr. J. dat money? What me do?' I hab no receipt; hab to hunt all over the bad place to find you."

He got a receipt.

AWFUL.—Here is another awful conundrum: What is the difference between the man who has a weakness between the shoulder-blades, and the man who wants Congress to vote him \$100,000 for property confiscated during the rebellion? Now listen to the answer: One is a lame back and the other a back claim.—Norristown Herald.